

**THE GLOBE AND MAIL** 

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**LP**

The science is called rapid attribution analysis. Its goal is to gauge connections between climate heating and extreme weather events, such as the heat dome that recently cooked the Pacific Northwest.

Scientists with World Weather Attribution concluded that the heat dome's searing temperatures - the British Columbia village of Lytton came close to cracking 50 C the day before it was incinerated by fire - were "virtually impossible without human-caused climate change."

**TD**

Yesterday's warnings of the havoc climate change could deliver are increasingly being rewritten into the present tense. "We are in the future now," one Canadian fire ecologist recently told this newspaper. The world's average temperature is already more than 1 C higher than the late 1800s.

There is evidence that the intensity of storms is growing, with both droughts and floods becoming more common. So too forest fires - from Australia to Canada. Toronto's air quality on Monday, as smoke rolled in from fires in northwestern Ontario, was among the worst on Earth.

These batterings underscore the urgency to take action on climate heating. The long-term pledges are legion, but in the here and now, most countries, including Canada, have made little progress toward the goals in the 2015 Paris Agreement.

The International Energy Agency this week forecast that global emissions are about to surge to new highs.

But 2021 may one day be looked back on as the year when climate talk finally started turning into serious climate action, with global policy ambition reflecting the scale of the challenge.

In the United States, climate policy is a central pillar of Joe Biden's presidency. In Canada, the Trudeau government has one of the world's boldest carbon tax plans. And last week, the European Union pushed the policy needle further.

The EU outlined a suite of measures - including a groundbreaking plan for carbon tariffs. These recognize that trade and emissions are both global - and if a country gets tough on domestic emissions, it risks encouraging companies and even whole industries to simply move production to where the rules are weak, or non-existent.

The EU's "carbon border adjustment mechanism" aims to address this issue. The border measure is essential, the EU said, because affected industries otherwise could shift emissions abroad and "seriously undermine EU and global climate efforts."

The tax would ensure that imports into the 27-country union either pay a sufficient carbon charge overseas, or else face a charge at the border, equal to the EU's carbon price.

The EU aims to bring this into force in 2026; the first focus will be industries such as steel, cement and fertilizer.

The goal is not protectionism. It's about ensuring a level playing field when it comes to environmental standards.

The details of such a system - from determining the appropriate tariff levels to avoiding international trade battles - won't be easy to work out. But the idea is finally on the table, as a centrepiece, after years of discussion.

The absence of such tariffs has long led to carbon policy pretzels. Canada, for example, has had no choice but to largely exempt some trade-exposed industries from carbon pricing. The lack of international carbon pricing on, for example, cement or steel, meant that Canada has had to go very light on taxing emissions from those industries.

Carbon tariffs could change that story. A Canadian cement maker, subject to full carbon pricing and emissions limits, would not be at a disadvantage against competitors from countries with lax rules.

That's why the EU's plan is good news for Canada. This country is too small to lead, whereas the EU is big enough to set the agenda. The U.S. is also poised to move. Democratic legislators in Congress on Monday outlined plans for an American border carbon tax. It could come into force in 2024 and cover about one-eighth of imports, including steel and cement, as the EU plans, and also oil, natural gas and coal.

Canada could end up a winner under this framework, given that we have stronger climate rules than many other exporters to the U.S.

Turning plans for carbon tariffs into real policies won't be easy, and it won't happen overnight. From the EU to the U.S., there's a lot of politics to wade through. But this month's moves may be an inflection point for global climate policy.

And that's good news for the climate, and for Canada.

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